Boston Globe

SATURDAY MORNING, AUGUST 19, 1978 ® Telephon

Ray's London guard says he confessed

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — James Earl Ray told a Scotland Yard inspector before his return to the United States in 1968 that he killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "because he thought the slaying would make him a national hero," according to testimony released yesterday.

[illegible] the slaying: "This is [illegible] most damaging statement [illegible] against me."

Ray's attorney, Mark Lane, heatedly declared that the allegations lacked credibility and attacked the character of the inspector.

Later, the panel virtually demolished an account by a man quoted in Lane's book on the King murder, "Code Name Zorro," that Lane said supported Ray's claim that he was not at the murder scene at the time of the shooting. The man admitted that he lied to Lane and the National Enquirer newspaper when he said he saw Ray several blocks from the scene on April 4, 1968.

But first, while Ray sat on the witness stand for the third day of interrogation by the House assassinations committee, Rep. Samuel L. Devine (R-Ohio) revealed the contents of a recent [illegible]

Ray's nearly constant guard during the weeks of his imprisonment in London and thus became somewhat of a friend of the fugitive.

Eist, now a pub keeper, was asked by the committee's investigators on [illegible]

[illegible] the murder weapon. Ray [illegible] pleaded guilty and was sentenced, but has recanted his plea and maintains his innocence.

"Oh, no, no, no," Eist replied. "During the course of the conversation, he definitely — he didn't actually come out with it, but it was there in the conversation that he'd done it."

At another point, Eist said: "He was telling me that after the shooting when he left this place he panicked and threw the gun away. . . . I mean, there isn't any doubt from the conversation that he told me that he was admitting to me that he had done the murder."

Asked if Ray expressed a hatred of blacks — something Ray has long denied — Eist said: "There wasn't any doubt at all. He just hated black people."

"He was telling me," Eist went on in the interview, "that for him to have shot a black man of note in certain parts of America would make him into a national hero anyway. He seemed absolutely mad about publicity. He [illegible]

Eist said Ray predicted that he would make [illegible] and write books."

After the entire interview was read into the committee's record, Ray was asked to respond. He said: "That is probably the most damaging statement made against me. . . . It is false." Then he charged that the interview was evidence that the panel "intends to crucify me."

Lane returned to Ray's side about that time and said he had just placed a call to a barrister in England who denounced Eist as corrupt and called him "a disgrace to the England police force." Lane said his British contact told him that Eist had been forced off the job for unlawful conduct.

The attorney-author said the panel's use of Eist's statement was wholly unjustified. "I have never, in 28 years of practicing law, seen anything as terrible and as outrageous as this," he said.

The acting committee chairman, Rep. Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.), promised that the committee would pursue the issue of Eist's credibility. Eist, meanwhile, was quoted by Devine as saying that he had long [illegible] reported his conversations with Ray to [illegible]

After a brief recess following Lane's outburst, the District of Columbia delegate, Walter Fauntroy, asked that Ray be excused indefinitely while other witnesses were heard. Preyer acceded and said Ray would not be recalled until November.

The committee then called Coy Dean Cowden, a [illegible] Cowden said that Cowden claimed he saw Ray at a Texaco station. The same story appeared last October in the National Enquirer as "sensational new evidence" of Ray's possible innocence.

Rep. Robert Edgar (D-Pa.), after warning Cowden of the penalty of perjury, elicited his testimony that his account had been "completely false." Cowden admitted that he wasn't even in Tennessee on the day King was shot, but rather was at work in Beaumont, Tex.

Cowden said his part of the alibi story was concocted by Renfro Hays, whom Lane portrayed in his book as a dedicated defense investigator who has never given up his quest for the truth.